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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

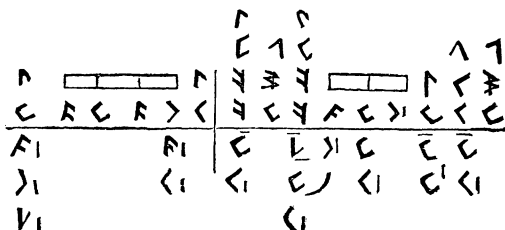
DECEMBER 1st, 1861.

ANCIENT BRITISH MUSIC,

By the late JOHN PARRY (Barrd Alaw).

(Concluded from page 134.)

Having given an outline of the ancient Welsh music, from the earliest memorials respecting it, to the subjugation of the country by Edward the First, I shall now make a few remarks respecting the *musical notation* used in Wales. The most ancient specimen of Welsh musical notation now extant, is in the library of the Welsh school, which was established in 1714. The whole of this specimen was published in the *Archæology of Wales*, a most valuable work, in three volumes, printed by the patriotic Owen Jones Myvyr, at an expense of £2000. The notation occupies about seventy pages of the third volume, of which the following fac-simile will give an idea:—



The characters used, are those of the ancient bardic alphabet; and it is very evident that *chords* were *struck*; for three and four letters are placed perpendicularly, one above another. The history of the above runs thus:—This MS. purports to have been transcribed by Robert ab Huw, of Bodwigan, in Anglesea, in the reign of Charles the First, from a manuscript of William Penllyn, a celebrated minstrel of the preceding century. And it is stated in a note, that the MS. comprises “The music of Britain, as settled by a congress, or meeting of chief musicians, by order of Gruffydd ab Cynan, Prince of North Wales, about A.D. 1100, with some of the most ancient pieces of the Britons, supposed to be handed down to us by the ancient bards.” Accompanying this manuscript are transcripts from another old writing, in the possession of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, Bart., entitled “The Repository of String Music within the three Principalities of Wales,” having, apparently, reference to the 12th century. It contains an explanation of several of the terms used in Welsh music, which are extremely complex. There are, besides, extracts from other old manuscripts, of a similar nature, and relating, it would appear, to the same period. Such is the claim to antiquity which the document under notice bears on the face of it; and, if it may safely be granted, the evidence it supplies must be considered of singular value, with reference

to the subject before us. And it may be mentioned, as an additional proof of its authenticity, as a record of Welsh music, that the notation is essentially different from any other now known. Dr. Burney describes this notation as one “by letters of the alphabet, somewhat resembling the tablature of the lute, but without lines, except a single one to separate the treble from the bass.” Since Dr. Burney’s time the whole of this specimen was submitted, by the erudite Dr. William Owen Pughe, to Bartholomon, the celebrated violinist. Bartholomon succeeded in deciphering most, if not all, of it, adopting, as the basis of his experiment, the notation of the ancient Spanish lute, as in use during the 16th century, which agrees with what Dr. Burney says of the conformity of the Welsh notation with the tablature of that instrument. It is extremely probable that the clue afforded by Bartholomon might have led to most successful results; but, unfortunately, only one of the tunes, as described by him, has been preserved; and that was inserted in the first volume of Welsh melodies published in 1809. This was, by a fortunate accident, transcribed by Dr. Pughe, or no instance of Bartholomon’s success might now have remained; for, at his death, in 1808, his manuscripts were dispersed, if not destroyed. This one comprises notations, illustrative of the twenty-four canons of music, together with twenty-nine ancient tunes, and a catalogue of more than one hundred and fifty others; which may supply some idea of the musical treasures formerly possessed by the Kymry.

The decyphering of these would certainly tend, in some degree, to make us acquainted with the general proficiency anciently attained by the Welsh in the art of music; but we should still be far from ascertaining the particular skill of the performers; and whether they were acquainted with counterpoint or not, has been a subject of much dispute. Counterpoint was known in Italy as early as the 11th century, about eighty years previous to the celebrated ordinance of Gruffydd ab Cynan; but that it was known and practised in Wales in the 12th century, may be inferred from the testimony of Giraldus Cambrensis, already quoted, and still more satisfactorily from that particular musical diversion, before noticed, called “singing or song in *four parts*, with accentuation,” which can hardly apply to anything but to that peculiar description of harmony known by the technical denomination of counterpoint.

I shall, in conclusion, offer a few remarks on the Harp. Of the high antiquity of this instrument, even among the Kymry, enough has been said, from unquestionable authorities; we have also strong presumptive proof, in the very *name* of the harp in the Welsh language, differing, as it does, from what is used in any other, and having for its root a Welsh word peculiarly applicable to the character of the instrument. This root is *Tel*, which implies anything drawn

straight or tight, which must have presented itself as the most obvious character of the harp, upon its original adoption—hence *Telyn*, the Welsh for harp. It is somewhat singular, with reference to the word *Telyn*, that the promontory on which *Toulon* is situated was anciently called *Cytharistes*, which bears the same relation to the Latin *cythara* that *Toulon* does to the Welsh *Telyn*; and the form of the Bay of *Toulon* resembles the comb of a harp. Camden says,—“If you ask the Britons what they call the harp, they will presently answer you, *Telyn*; if you could raise an ancient Phœnician, and ask him what are songs played on the harp, he would answer you, *Telynu*.”

With respect to the peculiar construction of this instrument in former times, and its compass, there is necessarily some obscurity; we find however that it was at first strung with hair, which continued in use until the commencement of the 15th century, when strings of gut were introduced. Anciently, too, the harp had only a single row of strings; but the performer was able, it is said, to produce accidental notes, by a peculiar management of the finger and thumb, now no longer known.

That considerable skill was employed in the mere mechanical effort of playing the harp, is evident, from the rudiments specified in the Welsh MS. which are seventeen in number, and seem to embrace, with the most technical nicety, every variety of manual dexterity of which the art is susceptible.

The directions given, bear the stamp of antiquity; among which are:—“The 6th tune is played as the 5th, only *raising two notes on the upper thumb*.” “The 12th is played like the 10th, only shaking the upper thumb.” “The 14th, is played like the 13th, but raising *three* notes on the upper thumb.” The following curious terms are also used:—“Choaking the thumb;” “shake of the *four* fingers;” [evidently a double shake] “shake of the *little* finger;” [not used now] “double *scrape*;” [probably drawing two fingers along the strings in thirds or sixes] “single *scrape*;” “half *scrape*;” “throw of the finger;” “double shake;” “shake of the bee;” “trill of the thumb;” “double choak;” [probably the present *étouffé*—or suddenly stopping the vibration of the strings] “forked choaking;” “back of the nail;” “jerk;” “great shake.” To a modern harp-player, these directions must appear extraordinary.

In the days of Queen Elizabeth, the number of strings on the harp was twenty-nine. The Welsh harp of the present day has three rows of strings, the two outer ones extending to about five octaves, the centre row (consisting of the flats and sharps) to about four octaves. The compass of the pedal harp, is from double low E to E in altissimo, or six octaves; lately, however, Mr. Erard has extended this compass, on his last patent instruments, besides increasing the power and quality of tone vastly.

I shall conclude this sketch with a stanza written by the late talented Mrs. Hemans, to the air of “*Arhyd y nos*,” or “the live-long night,” for the first volume of *Welsh Melodies*:—

“In the dwellings of our fathers,
Round the glad blaze,
Now the festive circle gathers,
With harps and lays:
Now the rush-strewn halls are ringing,
Steps are bounding, bards are singing,
Aye! the hour to all is bringing,
Peace, joy, or praise.”

This stanza is taken from a song supposed to have been sung by Gavran (a distinguished chieftain) and his companions, at sea, who, in the fifth century, went on a voyage, to discover some islands, which, by a traditional memorial, were known under the appellation of the ‘Green Isles of the Ocean;’ the expedition was not heard of afterwards.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BEETHOVEN, WITH REMARKS ON HIS STYLE,

By CIPRIANI POTTER.

FROM what has been already advanced relative to this celebrated composer, the musical portion of the public has been excited to know something more of his character and disposition, as well as to be still better acquainted with his works. A partial fulfilment of this demand will be attempted in the following article.

Beethoven’s music is now listened to with an attention and delight that his real friends and admirers could scarcely have anticipated. Not unfrequently, indeed, these feelings border on prejudice, since it is impossible that amateurs generally can appreciate those portions of his works, which the cultivated Professor is often at a loss to understand; nevertheless, it is gratifying to witness the anxiety with which the uninitiated endeavour to comprehend what is termed classical writing, emanating from so great a man; exerting their auricular and intellectual faculties, to admire that which, in all probability, is far from being congenial with their predisposed taste and ideas. This prostration of the understanding at the shrine of acknowledged genius, is encouraging to every labourer in the good cause of sterling music, and is the best assurance of a healthy and rational state being at hand.

Many persons have imbibed the notion, that Beethoven was by nature a morose and ill-tempered man. This opinion is perfectly erroneous. He was irritable, passionate, and of a melancholy turn of mind—all which affections arose from the deafness which, in his latter days, increased to an alarming extent. Opposed to these peculiarities in his temperament, he possessed a kind heart, and most acute feelings. Any disagreeable occurrence, resulting from his betrayal of irritability, he manifested the utmost anxiety to remove, by every possible acknowledgement of his indiscretion. The least interruption to his study